



# THE STORY OF A HUNCHBACK

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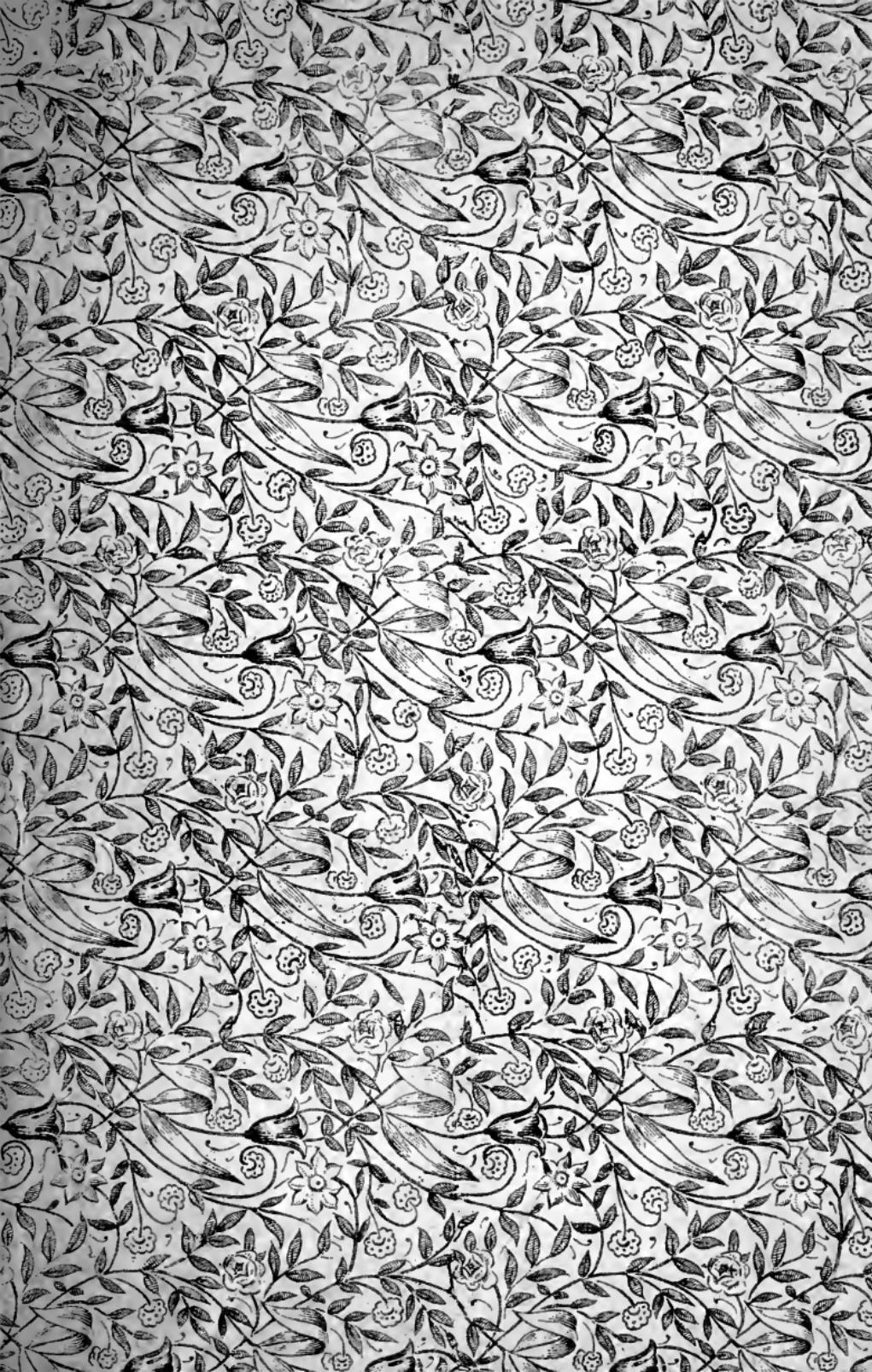
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# THE STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.



THE  
STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.

BY J. L.

*J. L. Jansen*

*"Via crucis via lucis."*



CHICAGO:  
JANSEN, McCLURG, & COMPANY.

1885.

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TO  
MY DEAR FATHER,  
IN  
LOVING AND REVERENT  
REMEMBRANCE.



THE  
STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.

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PART I.

WHEN Nature slowly lifts the hand  
Held tenderly o'er childhood's gaze,  
To shield it from the world's broad glare,  
We smile to see the glance, half bold,  
Half startled, of the fresh young eyes ;  
Yet some there are, alas ! to whom  
This earliest glance reveals a waste—  
A desert, boundless, overarched  
With burning skies ; ah, piteous  
It is to see a shadow fall  
O'er eyes scarce opened to the day !  
Our early grief, our young despair,  
Though lightly held in after years,

With chill breath pale the blood of youth,  
And wither frail spring flowers of joy  
Within the heart. For me, I know  
That, moving back across the years,  
And looking with the eyes of old  
Down vistas of dark days to come,  
I feel once more the crushing weight  
That lay upon my childish heart.  
Ah, yes, the puny hunchback-child  
Who stole away to hide his tears,  
When others ran to merry sports,  
Had visions of the coming years  
That were not fair to look upon.  
When first I woke to know my doom,  
And felt its prison walls grow strait  
About my life, I could but beat  
And bruise my heart against the bars ;  
For young desire ne'er yields to fate  
Without a struggle, blind and fierce  
And impotent, that ends at last  
In blank defeat ; and so I lived  
At strife, a rebel in God's world,

And shook my childish hand tight clenched  
Against the power that shaped my lot.

One priceless gift was mine at birth,  
Whose potent spell the years drew forth—  
A sense that thrilled to ecstasy,  
When beauty swept with touch of might  
Its vibrant chords. The mists of time  
Have never closed around the hour  
When first this inward sense awoke  
To conscious life; I lay alone  
At sunset, on a grassy bank,  
And felt the mellow sky stretch wide  
And calm above the quiet earth;  
When, suddenly, a lonely cloud  
That drifted overhead, caught fire,  
And sailed, a floating flame of rose,  
Across an amber sea; the throb  
Of frightened joy that shook my soul  
Beats through me still! they found me there  
In tears, and said, half pitiful:  
“He’s frightened to be left alone,

Poor lamb! He's but a baby still."  
Those early days! their dreary ghost  
Stares at me still in lonely hours.  
From vacant room to vacant room,  
In that sad home, whose sun of joy  
Had sunk behind a low, green grave—  
A sad-eyed, feeble child, I crept,  
And blindly sought, with groping heart,  
The mother-love that could not stoop  
Through gates of pearl to fold me 'round.  
My father's love, deep-channelled, strong,  
And still, moved on, and felt no need  
To burst its bounds in those fresh floods  
Of loving speech that keep hearts green.  
With steadfast will and kindly art  
He strove to prop my drooping life,  
But knew not how to make the sap  
Within flow fresh with quickening power.  
His careful thought it was, I knew  
In later years, that drew a shield  
Between my weakness and the world,  
By choosing that our home should lie

Away from cities, 'mid the green  
Of quiet fields, where I might stray  
In peace, not stabbed at every step  
By careless eyes ; and where fair sights  
And fragrant airs and happy sounds  
Might reach me with their gracious touch.  
He passed his days amid the din  
And ceaseless jar of city life,  
And brought a worn and saddened heart,  
At evening, to a lonely hearth ;  
And through the lagging hours of day,  
A silence deep and brooding filled  
The mournful house, through which I heard  
My stealing footsteps, one by one.  
A child of solitary ways  
And silent thoughts, I lived apart,  
And no one saw the waking soul  
Feel vaguely through the dark for light,  
And love, and God, the central heart  
Of love and light, whose glory throned  
Above the stars, gleamed faint and far.  
My father, lost among the mists

Of doubt that overbrood the age,  
And of a mind too strictly true  
To feign a faith where faith was dead,  
Let fall no word of God or heaven;  
My fond old nurse, a faithful soul  
And simple, muttered Latin prayers,  
And prated oft of virgin, saint,  
And pope, but so o'erlaid the face  
Of Truth divine with tawdry veils  
Of Romish weaving, that I lost  
Its brow sublime and smile of peace  
Beneath a shroud of glittering gauze.  
But, though the doors of conscious thought  
Were closed, God's love, like Christ of old,  
Passed in, unknown, with breath of peace.  
No soul is left to grope alone;  
Through thickest night, a hand unfelt  
Upholds and guides our faltering steps;  
And oft, from nature, robe of God,  
As from the seamless garment's hem,  
Flows healing virtue on the souls  
That know not yet His face, but press

Behind Him in the throng of life.  
The sunlit air, the happy sky,  
And fields, and hills, and springing flowers,  
Their ministries of comfort wrought  
Upon my heart in those young days;  
And ere I reached the glimmering arch  
Where eager and reluctant feet  
Pass forth to brave a world untried,  
There came an angel, unaware,—  
An angel splendor-winged, with breath  
Of quickening flame, whom men call Art,—  
And touched mine eyes, and all the earth  
Grew broad, and fair, and full of light.  
That strong, wild thrill, that mingled sense  
Of power and longing infinite—  
When *first*, from lonely heights of soul  
Beyond our ken there leap in joy  
The sparkling streams of eager thought—  
There's naught in all this life of ours,  
Save wakening love, so sweet, so strange,  
So full of rapture touched with pain!  
Like soft spring airs that wake the chords

Of vague regret, steals o'er my heart  
The memory of those blissful hours,  
When, sheltered in a quiet nook  
Roofed o'er with leaves and flecks of blue,  
Where silence trembled into sound  
More soft, and sound in silence merged,  
I lay, and dreamed, and wove a web  
Of pencilled shapes around the dreams  
That trooped through fancy's radiant halls.  
A narrow strip of vivid blue  
Between two dull and leaden clouds,  
Those fair, calm years of wakening power  
And fervid life shone brightly out  
Between a past of dreary years,  
And darker future sweeping near.

## PART II.

Scarce had my heart, unused to joy,  
Its wings in sunny skies unfurled,  
When, smitten by a sudden shaft,  
It quivered, bleeding, back to earth.  
Death from my father's yearning eyes  
Had swept the clinging mists of earth  
To let the great Beyond shine in,  
And I stood shivering in the chill  
And vacant gloom of life, alone.  
An upturned face, calm, pallid, strange,  
That filled with breathless, creeping dread  
The darkened room where, mute and  
stunned,  
I gazed, and could not move nor weep—  
A coffin closed above that face  
Which still on me gleamed white and  
strange,

Then silence, blankness, pressing close  
With stifling weight around my heart.  
O, memory, throw not back thy light  
So vividly on that dead face,  
That new-made grave, that dumb despair :  
Across the fields of youth, grown fair  
With timid shoots of hope's fresh green,  
There swept a bitter, barren flood,  
From whose dark waves to darker skies  
I raised a dull and vacant gaze.  
The slender wall of human love  
That screened my spirit from the void—  
The infinite unknown—was rent,  
And wailing winds, from lonely wastes,  
Rushed in and smote the chords of dread.  
Art, tranquil-eyed, serene, draws back,  
And leaves us with our first, fresh grief;  
For well she knows the blinding tears  
That blur, to-day, her visions fair  
Will fall, and leave the inward sight,  
For high revealings, clearer grown ;  
And waits till we have ceased to weep,

And looking up reach out once more  
To grasp her trailing robes of light ;  
But God waits not for tears to cease ;  
Our grief, though oft we know it not,  
Is but the shadow of His wings,  
Outspread to fold our trembling souls.  
Unconscious of His brooding love,  
I saw the outer light grow dim,  
But felt not yet His mighty heart  
Against my soul beat, through the dark ;  
I only knew that joy had fled,  
And life was desolate and vain.

Behind me, eighteen quiet years ;  
Sad, lonely oft, yet sheltered years ;  
Before me, paths unknown that lay  
Amid the eager, jostling throng  
Who thrust aside, with pitying scorn,  
The stunted, weak, unneeded lives  
That creep along their busy ways —  
So stood I — met the eyes of fate  
With steady gaze, and chose my lot.

I left the green, familiar fields,  
Long loved, and trod with lingering feet ;  
And sought the city, there to plunge  
With shrinking yet unswerving will  
Within its hurrying tide of life.  
One quiet refuge still was mine,  
An upper room, whence, looking out  
Above a crowded street, I felt  
The silence of the sky descend  
In blessing on the homes of men,  
And hushed my heart against its calm.  
But through the day, I sat and toiled  
With happier toilers, unto whom  
The art I turned to for relief  
Brought eager joy; as, once, to me  
With flush of dawning power it brought.  
Amid their wealth of bounding life,  
That flung its foam of careless speech  
Abroad in sparkling showers of mirth,  
I felt the loneliness of one  
Who, through a grating, sees the sky,  
And hears the songs of birds in spring.

Their furtive glances oft I felt  
Turned toward me, as I bent at work,  
The pencil moving, though the heart  
No more moved with it as of old.  
One glance, more gentle than the rest,  
Left in my mind its haunting light,  
That first awoke the morbid fear  
Of pity, born of pride and pain;  
Then drew me by its subtle charm,  
To seek it, as a ray of joy.  
From one it came, whose clear blue eyes,  
Undimmed by shade of guile or grief,  
Shone bright and soft as summer skies.  
The merriest of them all he seemed,  
And through his fresh, spontaneous mirth  
There flashed no flame of mocking scorn.  
I loved to watch him as he worked,  
With rapid hand and eager eyes,  
Then, throwing back the wave of hair  
That swept his brows, and pausing, gazed,  
With gathering frown, as one who sees  
His bright ideal missed once more.

One day, when all the rest had gone,  
The work hour being past, and I,  
Absorbed, a moment stayed  
To seize and bind a fleeting thought,  
He lingered, hesitating, near;  
Then with a sudden smile came close,  
And stood, in silence, at my side.  
And when, my work complete, I rose,  
He said,—not with the air of one  
Who gives a favor, giving praise:—  
“A glance, a master-sweep of brush,  
And on your canvas captive lies  
The beauty that my hand pursues  
In vain. Oft in my jealous dreams  
I see our mighty mistress smile,  
And point to Leslie Howard’s name  
Upon the future’s secret page;  
And well I know the laurel crown  
I toil and pant to win, will fall  
Without a struggle on your brows.”  
“Give me the buoyant life that fills  
Your veins, the strength you lightly wear,

The power to move among my peers  
And share the hopes and loves and joys  
That stir the common heart of man—  
And take the paltry crown of Art  
Which, should I wear it, would but fix  
The cold and curious eyes of men  
On one to whom their gaze is pain.”  
The words rushed forth; but as they fell,  
I hated them for laying bare  
The wound that silence thought to hide;  
His truer instinct, heeding not  
The warning flush that burnt my cheek,  
Touched fearlessly, yet tenderly,  
The quivering chord that none before,  
Through all the years, had dared to  
touch.

“The joy of strength that fills my veins  
I share with all the lower lives  
That feed and sleep and move and rest,  
And have no sense of aught beyond;  
But manhood’s grandest might is yours,  
Who lift a burden as you climb

In triumph up the steeps of art.  
Fear not the cold and curious eyes,  
Nor yet the pitying glance of men,  
For they who conquer weakness, stand  
Among the heroes of the world,  
Who win and wear its reverent love.”  
A gleam of vivid sunshine fell,  
With sudden glory, through the bars  
That shut me from the outer world:  
I grasped his hand, but spoke no word,  
And with a bright and swift “Good-bye!  
We meet to-morrow!” he was gone.

In Arthur Linden, nature’s hand  
Had blent the glow of southern suns  
With breezes of the bracing north:  
His tenderness made sweet his strength;  
His pity kept his gladness warm.  
The shadow on another’s life  
To him was like a beckoning hand  
That claimed a share in his warm light;  
And so, when I, whose body bore

Before all eyes its seal of pain,  
Heart-sick and lonely crossed his path,  
His eager pity, reaching forth,  
Threw round my heart its quick embrace.  
A friendship, growing warm and close  
As time passed on, knit fast our hearts,  
He giving, I receiving all,  
Save as my very need itself  
Was minister of joy to him,  
Through love's deep mystery whereby  
Who giveth most hath largest bliss.  
The sunshine of his radiant smile  
Around my lonely room he shed;  
And left the memory of his voice  
To fill with sense of human love  
The silence, when alone I sat  
And faced the haunting shapes of doubt  
That chilled me with their icy touch.  
His breath rekindled into flame  
The fires of thought that dimly glowed  
Beneath the ashes of spent grief;  
And I grew conscious of a life

Beyond the aching sense of loss,  
As hand in hand we wandered on,  
Where shining foot-prints of great souls  
Make luminous the ways of art.  
To his bright soul the beautiful  
Was as a finer air wherein  
To soar and breathe delight;  
While I, from tossing deeps of doubt  
And pain uplooking, felt a vague  
And yearning sense of some vast truth,  
Beyond my grasp, wherein should meet  
The holy and the beautiful  
In union flawless, absolute,—  
Forever whole, forever one.  
He, conscious of no discord, lack,  
Or thwarted longing, slowly sipped  
With lingering lips the cup of joy,  
And marvelled as I, panting, pressed  
In ever baffled, vain pursuit  
Behind a flying dream of truth.  
Through glow, through gloom, o'er fragrant fields

And burning sands I followed on,  
And still, upon the misty verge  
Of farthest thought, the vision gleamed.  
Oh weary search! Oh needless pain!  
Since at my side, the Truth Himself,  
In love and yearning pity moved.

Among new-fledged and dazzled minds,  
Which fancied that the sun of truth  
Rose when their blinking eyes unclosed,  
I daily met an easy doubt  
Of aught beyond the sphere of sense,  
With careless air worn jauntily  
Like some new mode, or lightly dropped,  
With shallow jests from laughing lips:  
And once, when I in silence stood  
Applauding not, amid a group  
Who hailed with loud applause a shaft  
Of pointless wit, aimed carelessly  
Against the saving hope to which,  
Through all its anguish, sin and shame,  
The struggling world has ever clung,

They pressed me with a mocking charge  
Of faith "in that vain, empty dream  
Of God and heaven, that narrow minds  
Will cling to still, though science, wise  
With Nature's larger teaching, sees  
In changeless law the only God."  
And I, too sad for scorn, replied:  
"I know not yet the God whose name  
From mouth to mouth you lightly toss,  
But to my ear, from awful deeps  
Of silent darkness round the world,  
Comes back the echo of your jest—  
A hollow murmur full of woe  
And longing.—If we are indeed  
But transient breathings of a life  
Without a soul—if on the verge  
Of nothingness we stand and gaze,  
And clutch with feeble hands the sense  
Of being ere it slips our grasp,  
Is then our fate so blest that we  
Should boast our heritage of death,  
And make a sport of happier hopes?"

A smile of light surprise went round,  
And as I slowly moved away  
One whispered, yet I caught the words—  
“To such, life must indeed be dark!  
They should be left to die at birth,  
As in the wiser days of Greece.”  
And I, in bitterness of heart,  
(Forgive me Lord!) thought, “Aye, they  
should,  
If what these babbling sages teach  
Be true, and sense the bound of life.”  
It chanced that, as I left this group  
Of self-admiring votaries  
To trim their lamps before the shrine  
Of doubt, I sought the home of one,  
A fellow artist, who lay ill  
And (as I feared) without a friend.

A tender glory from far skies,  
That flamed around the dying sun,  
Made fair the room wherein he lay;  
And, pausing at the open door,

I saw it light the lifted face  
Of one who prayed beside the bed.  
No prayer, save muttered Latin words,  
Caught up in childish days as charms  
To soothe or balk a dreaded power,  
Had ever fallen on my ear,  
Till through me as I listening stood  
There swept a voice that seemed to float  
In strong repose o'er mighty deeps  
Of being; and I grew aware  
Of words that caught away my soul  
Above the endless round of doubt,  
And held it, poised, in light serene.  
“Most Pitiful! whose depths of love,  
Like sunlit air, enfold the world,  
This blinded child in darkness gropes;  
Yet, like a wakening bird at dawn,  
Doth faintly feel a thrill of light  
Steal through his being; and is fain  
To greet the sun; O Christ, in whom  
The human heart of God laid bare,  
In utmost love and suffering beat

Beneath the spurning feet of men,  
And still, in changeless pity, beats!  
I plead not, what am I to plead  
For love that doth outrun our thought?  
But with my prayer I fain would guide  
His groping hand Thine hand to grasp:  
The thronging host of hopes and fears  
And passions and delights that filled  
With noisy life his fleeting days,  
And drowned the Spirit's call, has fled;  
A soul disrobed of earth, alone,  
He stands amid the awful shapes  
Of things eternal, and his cry  
Goes up to Thee; O Thou to whom  
The first, faint, struggling breath of souls  
Is precious, lift him, Lord of love,  
And let him feel Thy folding arms!"  
A low sigh broke across the words,  
And he who prayed arose, and stood  
In silence by the pillow'd face  
Whose flickering light the hand of death  
Had caught away from mortal eyes:

Then, with the look a mother gives  
Her tired child who sleepeth soft,  
Bent low and kissed the pallid brow.

With footsteps hushed, I turned away,  
And from the house passed blindly on,  
Rapt, trembling, in the vivid sense  
Of some vast presence, pitying, pure,  
Sublime, revealed within my soul.

And while earth slept, and stars kept watch  
Through silent hours, heart-hushed, I moved  
Beside the earthly ways of Him  
Whose footprints, on the snowy heights  
Sun bathed, serene, of perfect life,  
Still lure the slow-paced ages on.

The veil of creeds, through which the light  
That lighteneth all the weary world  
Too oft but dimly struggles forth,  
I flung aside; and saw the face  
Of Him I followed, from the fires  
Of blended love and pain, shine fair  
And ever fairer as I gazed:

Till, softly, as the rising moon  
That climbs behind the hills, and sheds  
A fair, faint dawn above their tops,  
Then cleaves the sky with silver edge,  
And rounding to a perfect orb,  
Thrills all the air with tender light,  
Within my soul a vision rose,  
That filled the utmost deeps of thought  
With quivering waves of joy and awe—  
The vision of a mighty love,  
Forth reaching from the heart of God,  
Through human hands, to lift the world  
Toward heaven—the vision of that love  
Rejected, scorned, yet triumph-crowned;  
By might of suffering, strong to break  
The chains of sin, and draw the soul  
Through cleansing fires to life divine.  
“O, Love! O, Love ineffable!  
That by Thy power upliftest souls  
As from the ocean deeps the sun  
Uplifts the clouds—I turn to Thee!  
Oh, lift me! lift me! for Thou canst!”

So cried I as the vision dawned:  
Then from my spirit fell the bonds  
Of doubt,—new-born of love, I lay,  
A child within the arms of God,  
Without a thought beyond His face.

The morning broke: the world without  
Awoke; the daily round of life  
Began once more; but in my heart  
The freshness of a primal dawn  
Made fair the common light of earth:  
Life lay illumined, pain and grief  
Seemed only as the rugged steeps  
Whereby the soul must climb to reach  
The heights of being; and the sky  
Of love, pure azure, clasped the world.

## PART III.

The calm years, rich with broadening life  
And ever deepening peace, passed on ;  
The bar that held my soul aloof  
From others, melted in the fire  
Of love divine : no more apart  
In solitudes of pain and doubt  
I brooded o'er the woes of earth,  
But, passing forth, and pressing near,  
To hearts that failed 'neath weary loads,  
I strove by gentle force of love,  
And patience warm with quenchless hope,  
To draw them toward those mighty arms  
That wait to lift from every soul  
The burden of its doubt and sin.  
And oft I trembled with the joy  
That thrills exultant, rapturous,  
From all the quivering harps of heaven—

The joy of seeing smiles of peace  
On troubled faces softly dawn,  
As over groping hands closed warm  
The clasp of love, that neither life  
Nor death has power to loose ; and oft  
Alas ! I tasted of His pain  
Who saw with agony of love  
Unbounded, fathomless, the souls  
He came to free, content with chains.  
One shadow haunted all my joy ;  
The friend who first with vital warmth  
Of human sympathy, had stirred  
To quicker beat my failing pulse,  
Walked on beneath a sky of joy  
O'er which no darkly gathered clouds  
Had drawn the brooding shades of life,  
With eyes too full of happy light  
To crave the shining of God's face.  
When, in the flush of hopes new found  
I spoke of healing for the world,  
Of God brought near to man, of peace  
In pain and triumph over sin,

He gently smiled, as one who hears  
A dreamer murmuring broken words  
Of woods and fields and waves of blue,  
And will not break his happy sleep—  
Then said: “Most glad I am, dear friend.  
Your goal, long sought, is won at last;  
For me, I see the fields of life  
Stretch wide and fair, and take the paths  
I find, that lead my willing feet  
Through fragrant groves by sparkling  
streams;  
To you I leave the dizzy ledge,  
Where truth with doubtful balance treads.”  
No mocking word e'er passed his lips;  
And yet I knew he looked on me  
As on a child who reaches forth  
To grasp his image in a glass.  
I could but hope that God's dear love,  
With daily pressure still and strong,  
Would force the portals of his heart:  
But oft I feared that naught but winds  
Of mighty woe could burst their bars,

To let the waiting Christ pass in.  
Our love unsevered by the strain  
Of thoughts that farther pressed apart,  
As time went by, still held us close.

One sunny day in early Spring,  
When sheltered snows that lingered still  
Fed sparkling rills, and that first breath  
Drawn softly by the wakening year,  
Stirred joy, that yearning, broke in pain,  
He greeted me with shining eyes,  
And like a happy child, poured forth  
The joy that sparkled through his glance:  
“My own Queen Mab, my fairy queen  
Who sends her flying elves by stealth  
To fill my canvas with her dreams,  
Will soon be at my side to breathe  
Her secret magic in my ear;  
Beware, my friend! we yet shall snatch  
Those flaunting laurels from your brows.”  
And then I knew he spoke of Grace—  
A sister dearly loved, whose name,

With proud and tender praises blent,  
Was often on the brother's lips,  
And who, through all their orphaned life,  
Had made her home with distant friends,  
But now, a woman, with the right  
To make her choice of lot, was fain  
To fill for him the woman's place,  
Where yet none dearer sat enshrined.  
“Come, you shall see the home I choose,  
And help to make it fair; we'll have  
No desert blank of whitened walls  
Around the eyes that love to rest  
Upon the living bloom of earth.”  
I trembled as he lightly spoke,  
Half conscious of reluctant dread,  
That blended with a quivering sense  
Of coming joy: a foot-fall faint,  
Far heard, woke echoes in the deeps  
Of formless thought, that would not die,  
But sounded clearly, strangely on,  
Through happy hours, wherein we strove  
With playful rivalry of brush

And fancy to make fair the house,  
Where eager love was fain to light  
The hearth-fires of a new-made home.

I, living in a world apart,  
Whose bound no woman's foot had passed,  
Had kept the stainless reverence  
And sacred tenderness of thought  
That soften, like a floating haze,  
The dewy morning hours of life.  
To me, imprisoned in a form  
That moved the pity of the strong  
And fair, the thought of woman's love  
Was like an Eden, never trod,  
Close guarded by a sword of flame.  
Oft, as a homeless wanderer looks  
Through lighted casements of bright homes,  
I gazed with yearning hopelessness  
Upon the light of wedded joy;  
Then, clasping close the hand divine,  
Walked on, in peace, beneath calm stars.  
But now, this far-heard footstep broke

The starlit silence round my heart  
With presage of a coming change.

Unworded fancies, dim and sweet,  
Breathed outward through the forms I chose  
To wreath around the womanhood  
Whose unknown glories filled my dreams  
With radiance tremulous and fair.  
Pure lilies, and that faint, flushed flower  
That nestles with its lowly leaves  
Against the beating heart of Spring;  
Far glimmerings of snow-clad peaks,  
And gleams of blue through clustering  
leaves,  
Where veils 'neath which my thought  
stole forth,  
Close shrouded from the common eye;  
While through my musings ran this song,  
That seemed a breathing from the lips  
Of the far Future whose vague form  
Swept dimly toward me through the dark:

Upon a river's brink  
A lily fair  
Her brows uplifted light  
Through summer air.

The soft breeze whispered low  
His tale of bliss;  
And touched her velvet cheek  
With tender kiss:

But ah, the fickle breeze  
Passed swiftly on:  
And stole away the joy  
His lips had won.

The sunlight on her heart  
In sweet rest lay,  
And dreamed, in golden calm,  
The hours away.

But when night beckoned soft,  
The false sun fled,  
And left his love to mourn,  
Uncomforted.

But ever at her feet  
The river flowed;  
And in his constant heart  
Her image glowed.

Through daylight and through dark  
His tide, unknown,  
Sent freshness through her life,  
Yet flowed alone.

And when she drooped and died,  
Upon his breast  
He bore her tenderly  
Away to rest.

There came a day,—how blue and fair  
It shines within my memory still!  
When Arthur bade me, with a smile,  
Come home and see the nested bird  
For whose sweet sake our eager hands  
Had conjured with the spells of art.

I see her as she lightly rose  
To greet her brother's friend, her glance  
Of pity veiled with woman's art,  
Afraid of wounding when she longed  
To soothe; I feel again the pain  
Unspeakable, with which I stood  
A boy in stature, but a man  
In soul, with manhood's fervent might  
Of being, crowned,—and met the eyes  
Of her through whom my floating dream  
Of woman's perfectness reached forth,  
And touched me with a human hand.  
A moment through my being surged  
A fiery flood that burned away  
The thought of God, then suddenly,  
With swiftly sinking waves, it fled;  
And that still sea of peace, wherein  
The image of the love supreme  
Lies mirrored, filled my soul once more.  
The shade of self paled out of sight;  
And, overflooded with pure joy,  
I lifted, like a lowly flower

That feels the sun and rests content,  
My passive heart, and drank the light  
Of her sweet presence in rapt calm.  
Her beauty! Think you I have words  
For that? Nay, ask the rose of June,  
That pulses from its throbbing heart  
Pure flushes, growing softly pale  
As loth to bare before the world  
The secret of its tender fire;  
Go, listen to the dying fall  
Of liquid melodies, or watch  
The sunset touch the hills with light,  
Not of the earth, or heaven—too pure  
For earth, too passion-tinged for heaven;  
And if their clearer speech doth fail,  
Think not that any word of mine  
The subtle mystery could reach.

As homeward, 'neath the clear spring sky,  
Star-luminous, and bare of clouds,  
My slow feet passed, I bared my brows  
In silent reverence of joy

That God had made the earth so fair,  
That love was sweet, and hearts were glad,  
And though no heart in all the throng  
Should e'er, by sweet allurement drawn,  
Press close to blend with mine its beats  
In rhythmic harmony of love,  
Yet through my soul surged mightily  
The love and joy of all the world.

A stream, that long had flowed unknown  
Beneath my life, burst suddenly  
To light, and glad with stainless blue,  
Its happy secret sparkled forth  
In golden-gleaming, murmurous waves.  
Its low song rippled through my thought,  
And all the common ways of life  
Were touched with dreamful tenderness.  
The young, fresh green that fringed the  
streets,  
Clear, sudden bird-songs, trilling high  
Above their din, and purest blue  
Around the slowly melting pearl

Of morning clouds,—by spells unknown,  
Their subtle sweetness interfused  
With something beautiful and strange  
That softly stirred within my heart.  
I knew not how nor whence it came,  
But felt it touch the hidden chords  
Of shrinking joy and blissful pain.

Night after night, with quickened pulse,  
And passionate, expectant thrill,  
I lifted to my eager lips  
The brimming cup that fate held forth,  
And knew not that its sparkling draught  
Should slowly fill my veins with fire.  
Night after night I steeped my heart  
In mellow radiance, falling fair  
From her clear mind whose changeful  
thoughts  
Their tints ethereal softly blent.  
Her fancy, light as floating down  
Tossed idly by the summer breeze,  
With sportive grace, played airily

Around our slower-moving thought;  
And yet, beneath her lighter mood  
There glowed a fire of life intense  
That oft burst forth in sudden flame  
Of eager speech, and dimly showed  
Like beacons on a rock-bound shore  
A tossing sea of troublous thought.  
Like Raphael's Margaret, in the lone  
And shadowed wilderness of life,  
Her white feet on the dragon's wing,  
She stood, and felt his fiery breath  
Against her stainless garments blown,  
And searched the dark with baffled gaze  
That could not pierce the murky air  
To rest with Margaret's on His face  
Who shines away the shades of fear.  
Oh, how I longed that, through my soul,  
Some ray, though faint, of God's pure light,  
Upon her straining eyes might fall!  
Oft, when in quiet evening hours  
Our happy talk took graver tone  
From some new-fallen shade of grief

On other lives, and I, with words  
Too slow and faltering for the thought  
That pressed for fuller utterance, spoke  
Of that deep mystery of pain  
Through which, as through the belt of fire  
'Round Dante's purgatorial mount,  
All souls must pass who fain would  
    breathe  
The stormless air of perfect life,—  
I felt her clear gaze search my face  
With eager longing in its depths;  
And watched the slowly-mounting flush  
That told the dawning of new thought.  
At last, there came a sudden change  
Which laid my life so close to hers  
That I could dare, with gentle hand,  
To lift the veil of shy reserve  
Close-drawn around her inner thought.  
A fever creeping through close streets  
Where crowded life sowed seeds of death,  
With blighting breath smote suddenly  
A poor street child, whose haggard face

Behind her stand of early flowers  
Had learned to greet me with a smile,  
As day by day I paused to buy,  
And strove to give a human tongue  
To the sweet messages breathed forth  
Through dewy petals from God's heart.  
And, learning that she lay in pain  
Beyond the reach of woman's care,  
I saw that my unskilful hands  
Must act the woman's as they might;  
And seeking, found her fever-parched,  
Alone, with blank, delirious eyes.  
And while I bent above the face  
So piteous in its shrivelled youth,  
A staggering step without drew near  
And paused within the open door:  
Then, reading by the lightning flash  
Of instant thought, the whole sad tale,  
I left the bed and turned to face  
The drunken father, as he stood,  
Surprised, in sullen, bestial rage.  
An instant, with a savage stare,

He met my gaze; then raised his arm  
And with a sudden, dizzy sense  
Of blinding pain, I reeled and fell.

When from the dark and vast unknown,  
My spirit floated back to light,  
I lay in Arthur Linden's arms,  
And with a dreamy wonder saw  
The quick tears gathering in his eyes,  
As, bending low above my face,  
He watched the life-tide creeping back;  
Then, like the sound of far joy-bells  
Heard faintly through a sunny sea  
Of golden air, fell on my ear  
The distant voice of her I loved.  
As, slowly, in my dazzled sense  
The outer world took shape once more,  
I saw the dear, familiar walls  
That with so many happy hours  
Had blent their pictured fantasies,  
And knew I lay in Arthur's home,  
That Grace was moving overhead,

While through the open casement flowed  
A blended stream of breeze and light;  
And as I vainly strove to speak,  
The silence Arthur gently broke  
With playful tenderness of speech:  
“What hero of Homeric days  
Had not his favorite god, who moved  
Beside him, wrapped in clouds, and flashed  
To light when danger called? Behold  
The faithful Mars who felled your foe  
And bore his hero from the field.”  
While yet he spoke, Grace, drawing near,  
Had paused within the door, and stood  
With something stirring in her face  
So strangely sweet, I dared not gaze,  
But dropped my glance, as one who fears  
To taste the cup he may not drain.  
Her gentle sympathy with smiles  
And light responses met, she stood  
In silence at my side, her hand  
On Arthur’s arm; till, looking up,  
He stilled her fears with sportive words:

"What says our silent sister Grace  
Of this new Curtius, who would fain  
Fling down his life to close the gulf  
That yawns across the world?" And  
Grace,

Uplifting eyes wherein there shone  
The light of some fair thought, replied:  
"The knighthood of my early dream  
Still walks the earth; and Galahad  
Perchance has found the Holy Grail,  
And bears it unto dying lips."

The fresh, glad month of June had fled;  
And after many days of pain,  
I, lifted to a window, sat,  
With dreamy languor looking down  
Upon the moving life below,  
And turning o'er, with lingering touch,  
A book of poems, one that Grace  
Had treasured long, whose pages bore  
The traces of her loving choice,  
When on the margin of a leaf  
I found these verses lightly traced:

“O Childhood! thy thought is the breeze  
That sports with the bloom of the earth;  
Thy glance is the glow of the dawn,  
And the gush of the brooklet thy mirth.

“O Manhood! thy passions are winds  
That sweep that frail bloom from their path;  
Thy glance is the blaze of the noon,  
And lightning that sears is thy wrath.

“O Age! in thy voice is the moan  
Of surges that die on the shore;  
Thy glance is the light of a star  
That setteth to rise nevermore.

“O Life! to the infinite waste  
Is lifted thy gaze of despair;  
Thy voice is the sob of a world  
Grown weary of answerless prayer.”

And while I mused upon the words,  
I heard a light step drawing near;  
And did not close the open book,

But held it wide, as, with a smile,  
Grace leaned above me, looking down  
To note the lines that held my thought.  
A sudden flush swept cheek and brow,  
As on the faintly-pencilled words  
Her swift glance fell; and, starting back,  
She faltered low: "I had forgot;  
Will you forget them too?—and yet,"  
With sudden passion in her voice,  
"And yet, perchance, they touch a truth."  
"Turns life to you so sad a face?  
I would your eyes might feel the smile  
That gleams beneath her solemn gaze."  
"And have *you*, then, found life so sweet?"  
"So passing sweet and wonderful,  
That when the sun, from deeps unknown,  
Uplifts another shining day,  
And lays it down before my feet,  
I bow my heart in reverent joy."

The trembling barriers of reserve,  
Before strong tides of feeling fell,

And with clasped hands, and head thrown back,  
She let the pent-up thought of years  
Burst forth, with rush of rapid words :  
“I cannot feel the far-off sun ;  
A chilly shadow folds my heart ;  
And through the music of the world  
I hear a mighty wail of woe  
From trampled souls that bleed and die ;  
Beyond brief life I see a gulf  
Wherein fall joy and pain alike,  
And darkness is the end of all !  
Some talk of life and hope beyond,  
And smile at death ; but who can sound  
The dark abysses of the grave ?  
We dream of light ; but through our dream  
The mocking voice of doubt sounds on.  
‘Deluded souls ! ’tis but a dream !’  
We search for God ; but tangled creeds  
Have barred the path ; we lose our way,  
And know not where to seek His throne :  
Life drags, we know not whence nor why,

Across the desert sands of fate,  
Its pauseless, hopeless, endless march ;  
And yet, in ringing words of cheer,  
You call it ‘Passing sweet !’ What dream,  
What madness of the brain, is this ?”

A wave of pity swept my thought  
Beyond the narrow bounds of speech.  
Before my feet a quivering soul  
Lay panting in defiant pain ;  
A tender, homeless, wounded soul  
That, fallen on dark ways of doubt,  
Writhed helpless on the jagged rocks ;  
And all my love in holy fire  
Of yearning prayer flamed up to heaven :  
“Lord, though I may not feel her heart  
Against my own, oh let me feel  
That I have laid it at Thy feet !”  
A strange, deep calm came o’er my soul ;  
The mighty pain of passion, merged  
In love made pure of self, grew sweet ;  
And tenderly, as to a child,

I spoke the thought that words could reach :  
“Dear wanderer in a Father’s world,  
Within His wide embrace of love  
Doth all life lie ; no cold response  
From distant skies to earth’s deep moan  
Of helpless anguish hath God given,  
But, stooping low, hath shared the cup  
So bitter to our shrinking lips :  
Like fleeting clouds in summer skies,  
O’ershone by His incarnate love,  
Your doubts shall melt ; pause not for  
creeds ;  
Draw near and lift your gaze to His.”  
“O give me proof ! for doubt sees naught  
Beyond a shifting throng of doubts !”  
“Truth, to the soul that seeks but truth  
With single aim, shall prove itself :  
No eye e’er craved a lesser light  
To prove the shining of the sun,  
And God His own best witness is  
Within the soul that seeks His face.  
Fear not ; for through your haunting dream

Shall break the daylight world of faith.”  
A smile within her troubled glance  
Dawned, glimmering like a sudden star  
Through parted clouds; and murmuring  
low—

“ If doubt be then the dream, and faith  
The daylight world where phantoms fade,  
Oh pray that on my longing eyes  
Its light may break!” she turned away;  
And I, once more alone, sent forth  
In tenderness unspeakable  
My longing heart to wage with hers  
The weary war of struggling faith.

While day by day life gently poured  
Returning strength along my veins,  
My heart, by slow and sweet release  
From pain’s relaxing grasp set free,  
Looked out on life with tranquil gaze,  
That, filled with light of present joy,  
Saw not the deepening shade of pain  
That lay beyond: the morning came

And brought, as surely as the light  
That waked the birds, the happier light  
That waked within my soul the joy  
And melody of life; and Night,  
Star holy, pure and calm, her hand  
Upon my throbbing sense laid soft,  
And led me unto shrines of prayer,  
Where I might lay my longings deep  
Within the changeless peace of God.  
Through all those sunny days, my thoughts  
With one dear step kept rhythmic beat—  
A step that over fancy's range  
Of visioned heights, and o'er the green  
And dewy meads of tenderness,  
Moved fleet and noiseless as the light.  
Around the woman-heart of Grace  
An added shyness—from the hour  
When, suddenly set free, her thought  
Had fluttered trembling to my breast—  
Clung like a wreath of mountain mist  
That, parted by a sudden gust,  
Reveals a peak, then folds it close.

Oft, when round Arthur's easel grouped  
We filled the hours with rippling mirth,  
A sudden stillness o'er her face  
Would fall; and in her laughing eyes  
A far, faint glory gleam and fade  
Like sunsets over Alpine snows;  
And, drawing near her unaware,  
My footsteps oft would seem to break  
A strain that held her listening ear,  
As, with a start and fleeting blush,  
Her truant thought she summoned home.

Each morning, on the little stand  
Where lay my treasured books, I found,  
Placed by her gentle hand, a vase,  
That lifted to the morning light,  
From nest of green, one snow-white flower,  
With spotless gleam of dewy leaves;  
And when I, wondering, lightly asked  
The reason of her constant choice,  
With down-drooped lids she answered low:  
“They are the angels of the flowers,

And wear no passion-hues of earth."

And then I wondered more, and weighed  
With doubtful thought her faltered words.

A silence, tremulous and stirred  
With quivering movements of two souls,  
That thrilled to feel their garments touch,  
Drew round us as the days went by;  
And, fearful by the lightest breath  
To break its sweet and subtle spell,  
I stilled each throb of beating love  
And held my spirit strangely calm.  
A slow, soft change, like brightening dawn,  
Or deepening green of early leaves,  
Stole o'er her face, and on her brow  
There fell the still, clear light of peace.  
She spoke no word, and yet I knew  
Her weary soul was nestling close  
Within the waiting arms of God.  
And when one day I sat alone,  
She passed me with a timid haste,

And, scarcely pausing, in my hand  
Let gently fall this gift of joy:

### DREAMING AND WAKING.

Alone, beneath an awful sky,  
A starless, vacant sky,  
In visions of the night I stood:  
A moaning wind swept by,  
And through the dark, a cry—  
The mingled wail of many lips—  
Was borne on high.

Then through my dream there broke a  
voice  
From realms beyond the night :  
Awake ! awake ! the skies are clear,  
And, on thy sealèd sight  
Fall floods of golden light  
From radiant springs beyond the sweep  
Of azure height.

The dream hath fled ; the joyous heaven  
Smiles o'er mine unsealed eyes :  
Beyond the far horizon verge  
The dim night vanquished flies ;  
The green earth peaceful lies,  
With fresh bloom glad, and songs of birds  
That wing the skies.

By love's irresistible tide o'erswept,  
I bent, and touched the written words  
With trembling lips ; while in my heart  
Rose longings, helpless, passionate,  
To fling their hopeless agony  
Against the stony front of fate.

Some moments are there in our lives  
When, stripped of all disguise, and strong,  
The crouching passions of the soul,  
That slumbered till we deemed them dead,  
Leap suddenly to giant life,  
And close around the wavering will  
That trembles in their mighty grasp ;

And in that awful solitude  
Behind the bounds of flesh, there meet  
The powers whose soundless warfare fills  
The world, and shapes the fates of men.  
Such moments knew I, lying prone,  
Her message crushed within my grasp ;  
The outer world, and time and sense,  
I knew not, while the spirit strove  
And grappled with its viewless foes.  
Youth, bearing in its eager pulse  
A wordless prophecy of joy—  
A subtle kinship in its veins  
With all the gladness of the earth  
And sky, and every living thing,  
Treads regally, with lifted brows  
That claim their crown of coming bliss ;  
And when life fronts it suddenly  
With circlet sharp of thorns, it shrinks,  
And stands at bay in wild revolt ;  
The spirit of my youth, grown fierce  
With long denial, thus at bay,  
Writhed madly in the grasp of pain,

And vainly flung its fettered hands  
To clutch a joy beyond its reach.  
For let not those who walk the earth  
In calm accord with lines of grace  
And symmetries of form, forget  
That we on whom no human eye  
E'er rests with joy, have hearts that leap  
As swift and sudden at a glance,  
A voice, a touch, as hearts that beat  
In forms of faultless mould ; we too  
Can love ; and, though we may not hope,  
May yet despair ! Aye, woe to us  
When, through the dimness where we sit  
Apart from men, the torturer steals  
To lay us on the rack of love !  
On those dark hours no eye may look  
Save only His, who, while we pant  
In mortal anguish, lays His hand  
Upon our brows, and whispers low :  
“There is a joy that none may share  
Save they whose wills have found repose  
Within the perfect will of God ;

The meek inheritors of earth  
Who, empty-handed though they stand,  
Are yet partakers by a reach  
Of larger love, a grasp divine,  
In all the good of all the world."

So spake His voice within my soul,  
Above its tumult rising clear ;  
And as I listened, o'er my will  
There fell a deep and mighty peace ;  
And like to one who slowly wakes  
Sore wounded on a battle-field,  
And in the hush of early dawn,  
While stars melt softly overhead,  
Is 'ware of victory after strife,  
I lay, not painless, yet at rest,  
And felt a stirring as of wings  
That hovered o'er my weary heart.

An hour had passed, one little hour,  
And all the current of my life  
Was changed. While, in the pause of will  
That follows triumph dearly won,

I took no thought of days to come,  
There flashed before me, like a face  
Seen long before in happier years,  
The memory of a letter, read  
And flung aside while yet I trod  
The blooming haunts of silent love,  
And recked not where they led my feet:  
A letter from an artist friend,  
Who in the elder world had found  
The royal feast the kings of art  
Bequeathed us when they left the earth;  
And now, to make his bliss complete,  
Would have me share it at his side.  
Then sharply, suddenly, I felt  
The snapping of the slender tie  
Between my life and all that made  
It fair, and knew that I must go;  
I could not lie in beggar's guise  
Beside the door of one most rich  
In all the precious gifts of God,  
Most pitiful of others' lack,  
To crave with silent plea a boon

She might not give, and wring her heart  
With unavailing pain, a blot,  
A shadow on her sunny way :  
And as one fallen from a height  
Whereon midst bloom and light he walked  
Serene, looks up with failing gaze  
And sees the leaves that lightly sway  
Against the blue far overhead,  
I looked upon the life I loved,  
Then turned to face a life that seemed  
As bleak and grey as twilight skies  
When sunset's heart of fire has ceased  
To beat, and all the air is pale.

With firm intent to bar the gates  
Of strong resolve against surprise  
Of traitorous will, I rose and wrote :  
“ My friend, I grasp across the sea  
Your proffered hand, and come to sup  
Beside you at the feast of art.”  
The letter in my hand, I sought  
The two I loved, resolved to seal

My purpose with a swift farewell.  
By Arthur's easel, where the brush,  
Just laid aside to wait his hand,  
Lay idle, Grace I found alone ;  
A stillness pure and deeply sweet  
As silences of morning air  
Before the day has found a voice  
Was in the face she slowly raised  
To meet my gaze ; and flinging back  
The hungry pain that clutched my heart,  
I caught her joy and held it warm  
Against my breast, and with a smile  
That met her wordless greeting, said :  
“In vain we seek to reach with words  
The joys whose flow, unfathomed, sweeps  
From soul to soul : I can but say—  
Behold, your joy supreme is mine !  
As in your lifted eyes I read  
The open secret of a heart  
At rest upon the heart of God.  
Dear friend, that God has made you fair,  
Has clothed with robing of pure grace

A soul as stainless, clear and glad  
As sunlit spray on breaking waves;  
As swift and eager in its sweep  
Toward heavenly heights as mounting  
flame,

I thank Him, thank Him more, that I,  
Unworthy save by humble right  
Of utmost reverence, yet have stood  
Within the radiance of your life,  
And filled my spirit with a light  
That even through the outer dark  
So soon to fold me round, will shine  
Across my dim and lonely way.  
Dear friend, the bitter word I came  
To speak is even this: ‘Farewell!’  
I fain would find another, fit  
And sweeter, but it may not be—  
And so, ‘Farewell.’ I take my life  
Across the sea to seek a path  
Which, though it leads away from joy,  
May reach at last the heights of peace.”

With drooping face and tender smile,  
That trembled like a changeful gleam  
Of summer sun through tossing leaves,  
She listened till that word, "Farewell,"  
Smote with a sudden blow her heart,  
And then I saw her shrink ; the lips  
That would have quivered, closed ; a wave  
Of deepening crimson rose and fell,  
And left her pale ; and when I ceased  
She looked upon me with a look  
That all the years have never dimmed ;  
It was as if her spirit stood  
Beyond a darkly yawning gulf  
That none might leap, and beckoned me ;  
And passion, yet uncrushed, arose  
And bade me of her pity make  
A link to join our severed lives.  
A moment stood I motionless,  
Through all my being 'ware of naught  
But that appealing gaze ; and then,  
Like one who frees his captive limbs  
With sudden wrench from tightening bonds,

I broke the silence, breathing low—  
“God keep you, and farewell!” then turned,  
Not waiting for a word or sign,  
And left her standing mute and pale.

## PART IV.

Like painful, half-forgotten dreams,  
I feel again the sailing on  
'Twixt boundless wastes of sea and sky,  
That seemed to ache with loneliness;  
The landing on an alien shore  
Ungladdened by a friendly eye;  
The weary shifting of the scenes  
Whose strangeness was a constant grief;  
And then the meeting with a mind  
That overbrimmed with sparkling life,  
And swept me in its eager rush  
Beyond the dead, unchanging calm  
Of stagnant hope. One purpose strong  
And strengthening with the strength of soul  
Inwrought by fires of pain, upheld  
And led me through the days, while still  
My heart was bleeding out of sight:

The purpose, if I might, to wed  
The art I loved to holiest truth,  
And send it forth to war with sense.  
They told me at the school of art,  
Where with my friend I joined the ranks  
Of combatants for high success,  
That hues and forms were in my power  
To wield at will; and all the wise—  
Those magnates of a narrow world  
Who see the universe revolve  
Around a square of canvas—spoke,  
And bade me most of all beware  
Of flimsy dreams, and make my hand  
The slavish pupil of the eye,  
Recording only what appears;  
Their realism, held on high  
As creed, meant simply working close  
To nature while she moulds the clay  
Around a soul, and heeding not  
The spark divine that glimmers through;  
And I, who nursed no hope of fame,  
Nor cared to cheat the multitude

With soulless reflex of a world  
Made vital with the breath of God,  
Went on my way, and strove to work  
Within the sphere of art, as God  
In nature, bodying viewless truth  
In gracious forms to haunt the soul,  
And hush the clamorous cries of sense  
With breathings of a strain divine.

The years brought healing as they came,  
And strength, and peace; and life to me  
Was holy, calm, and gravely sweet,  
Without a sting, and full of hope:  
A hope that reached beyond the bound  
Where joy and pain are blending waves  
That never rest. Across the sea  
My earliest friend still kept a thought  
That turned to me, and letters came  
That told me of the life he led,  
The love that crowned him with a crown  
Above all price—Ah, she was fair,  
His peerless one! I could not know

How fair! For all his pictures, drawn  
With pen of flame, were colorless  
Beside the truth; and then a name  
That, moon-like, hid the lesser light  
Of common words, would seem to shine  
Alone, and I would read of Grace,  
Who grew, he wrote half playfully,  
A sweet and pensive nun, whose life  
Moved outward through the lives she  
    served,  
Who gathered children at her knee,  
And taught them tenderly, and soothed  
The friendless in their dying hours,  
And ministered to all whose needs  
Reached out to touch her loving heart.  
“You would not know our sportive Grace,”  
He said, “so calm and grave she grows,  
So quietly she moves, and sings  
Her songs no more about the house,  
Save softly, as one might to lull  
A restless child: she speaks of you—  
Not often, nor with many words—

For speech with her as one divines  
Is not the measure of the heart ;  
Yet speaks she with a touch of pride,  
And tenderly, and well I know  
She bears you in her steadfast thought.  
Each day a flower is on your stand ;—  
'He may come back !' she says, and smiles."  
So reading, through my pulses ran  
A yearning thrill of memory,  
And like a tyrant fain to prove  
His questioned power, the past arose  
And shook my being with a touch.  
One day—that seemed like other days,  
Yet cloaked a shadow with its sun—  
A letter, hailed with gladness, came  
To mock the healing of the years,  
And quicken to intenser life  
A slumbering pain :—a letter, brief,  
But throbbing as alive with beats  
Of dread that strove to still themselves  
As fearful of a fear betrayed.  
Grace, coming from the bed of one

Who died of fever, drooped, yet scorned  
To yield, until the fever sprang  
And wrapped her in its fiery coils ;  
And now through day and night she lay,  
A ghostly shadow of herself,  
That slowly wasted, hour by hour.

So wrote he ; and a horror strange  
And cold crept through me as I read ;  
While thought and will and reason paused,  
And nothing in me lived but pain.  
There is a yearning on whose swell,  
Resistless as the mighty heave  
Of ocean's breast, the soul is borne  
Far out beyond the calmer mood  
Wherein it moved in still resolve ;  
And such a yearning, solemn, strong,  
And almost holy in its depth  
Of passionless, despairing calm,  
Uplifted me above all doubts,  
And bore me on to seek the face  
That, through my every mood of mind,

Had shone with pure and constant light,  
As shines the wide and steadfast heaven  
Through every wandering wind that blows.  
One hope, one only hope, I held  
And would not look beyond; the hope  
To stand beside the one I loved,  
When love of mine, no more a snare  
To lure her life from happier love,  
Should lie among the things of earth  
Behind her, with no power to bind  
In any wise the passing soul.  
For strangely did I seem aware  
That death had claimed her, and no doubt  
Disturbed me saying, "Should she live,  
Then love revealed were still a chain  
Around her heart"; and so I went.

Once more I felt the boundless waste  
Of sea and sky—an azure pause  
Between the voices of the worlds—  
And then the days of blank suspense  
Were ended, and I knew she lived;

And, journeying, stood without the door  
Where oft of old my eager heart  
Had waited for a coming foot;  
There Arthur met me, sad and worn,  
And saying only, "Death is near,  
For I have seen his shadow fall;  
Yet tarries, while we fear to feel  
The moments passing"; clasped my hand  
And led me in; the silent house,  
So eloquent of buried joys,  
Was like an added wound to one  
Already dead; a numb suspense  
**O**f feeling held me as I stood  
And mutely waited for the word  
That bade me seek that chamber dim  
Wherein the radiance of my youth  
Was fading slowly from the earth.

A darkness with a central heart  
Of throbbing light, the chamber seemed,  
As entering in, I only saw  
Her eyes that turned to mine, her smile

That lightened strangely through the gloom;  
And from the darkness came her voice,—  
The same, yet sweeter, with a thrill  
Of mystic sweetness caught from heaven;  
I heard it softly breathe my name:  
Then, after silence, while our souls  
Reached forth and touched through meet-  
ing eyes,—  
From out that twilight border-land  
'Twixt earth and heaven, where passion  
dies,  
And love is pure—she spoke again:  
“'Twas so I saw it, yet the years  
Have touched it with an added light:  
The eyes are steadfast as of old,  
But tenderer, and the mouth—ah, there!  
'Twas sorrow graved that deeper line,—  
I know her hand; and now come near,  
That I may feel your touch once more,  
Your living touch, and know you live,  
Though I must die.” Then at that word

The veil of silence round my heart  
Was rent away, and love leaped forth  
In agony, to cope with death.

“O Love! O Love! you may not die  
And leave me on the empty earth,  
Whose very air will dumbly wait  
The voice it stills itself to hear!  
O love, live on! and let me feel  
Through all the world your beating heart!”  
So spake I wildly, bending low  
My head upon the hand I clasped.

“And you have loved me!”—with a thrill  
Of trembling joy her answer fell.

“My saint, whose aureole of flame  
Has led me on o'er rugged ways  
And up the steeps of high resolve,  
My love, whose lightest smile could make  
A silent gladness in my heart  
Too sweet for words,—ah, had I known!  
Dear love, you lightly weighed my heart  
To deem it might not leap the bars  
Of outward form to clasp a soul

That stood so near to God a light  
Was on it from His face ; and now  
'Tis death that clasps our parted hands,  
And draws us heart to heart at last,  
With touch of pity, ere we part :  
And yet, we part not ; love to love  
Can reach, across the silent void  
Between the worlds, and we shall know  
We live and love forevermore.

Ah, we have felt the weary ache  
Of longing, while the heavy days,  
Slow moving, bore us on apart ;  
But now the throbbing pain is still ;  
Beloved, lay upon my brow  
The seal of love, that death may see,  
And, smiling, touch me tenderly."  
With reverent lips, as one might touch  
An angel's wing, I kissed her brow,  
And far uplifted o'er the heights  
Of joy and pain our spirits met  
Within the silent infinite  
Of Heaven's untroubled, changeless love.

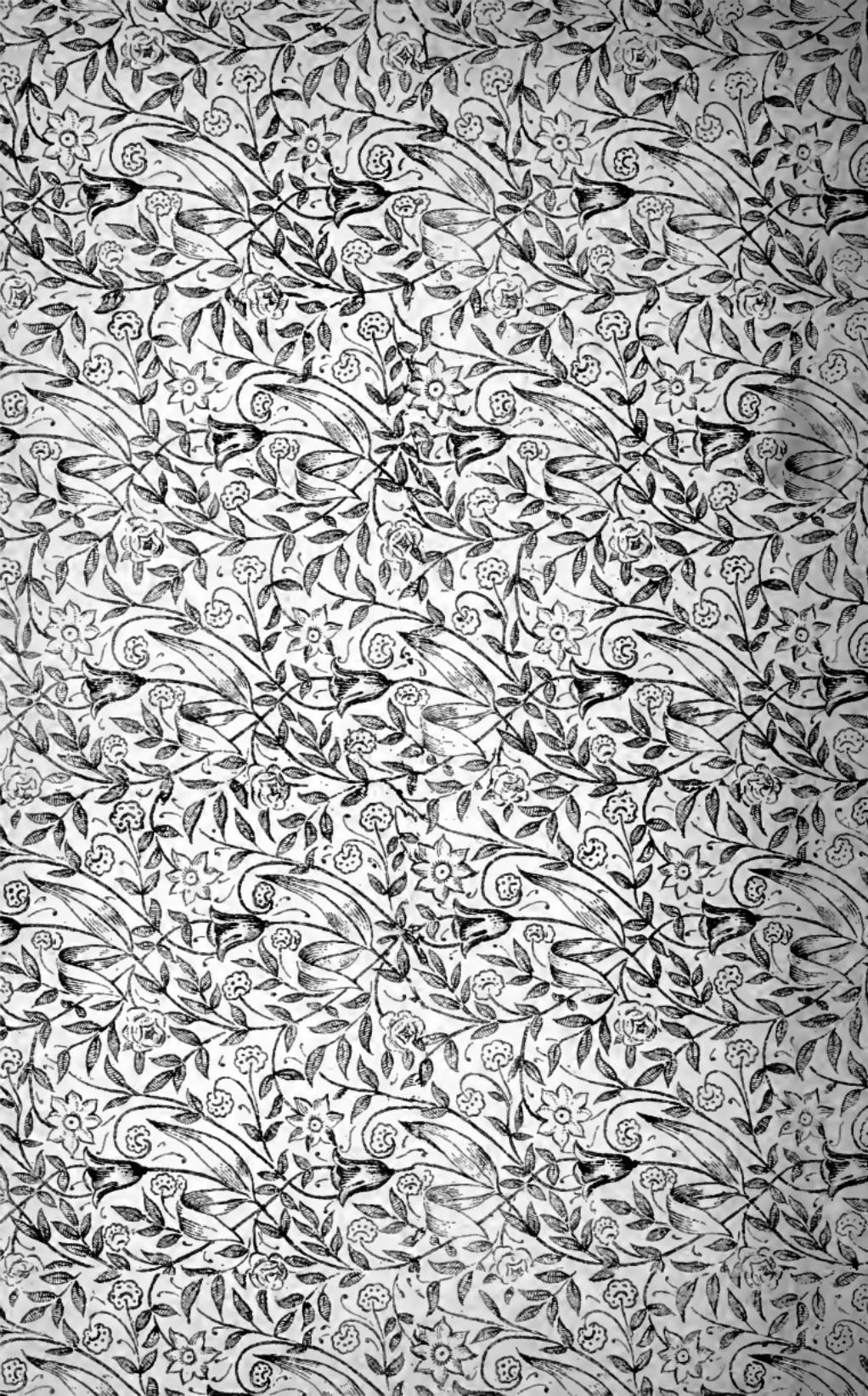
The moments passing touched us not,  
Nor knew we fear, till suddenly  
The hovering wings of death swept close ;  
His breath was on her cheek ; her eyes,  
That ever dwelt on mine, grew dim ;  
And then I knew the soul within  
Had soared to light, while like a cloud  
The earth around me darkly drew.  
Down slowly shortening aisles of time  
That widen out to larger light—  
Companioned by a shape serene  
Undimmed by earthly years—I move  
Beside the paths of other men :  
A spring of peace, that ever wells  
From deeps beneath the fickle flow  
Of earthly joy, o'erfloods my heart.  
The flower toward which with quickening  
life  
Our nature yearns—the flower of love—  
Has bloomed in mine, and, fading not,  
Has felt the touch of God and grown  
Immortal : oft through veils of sense

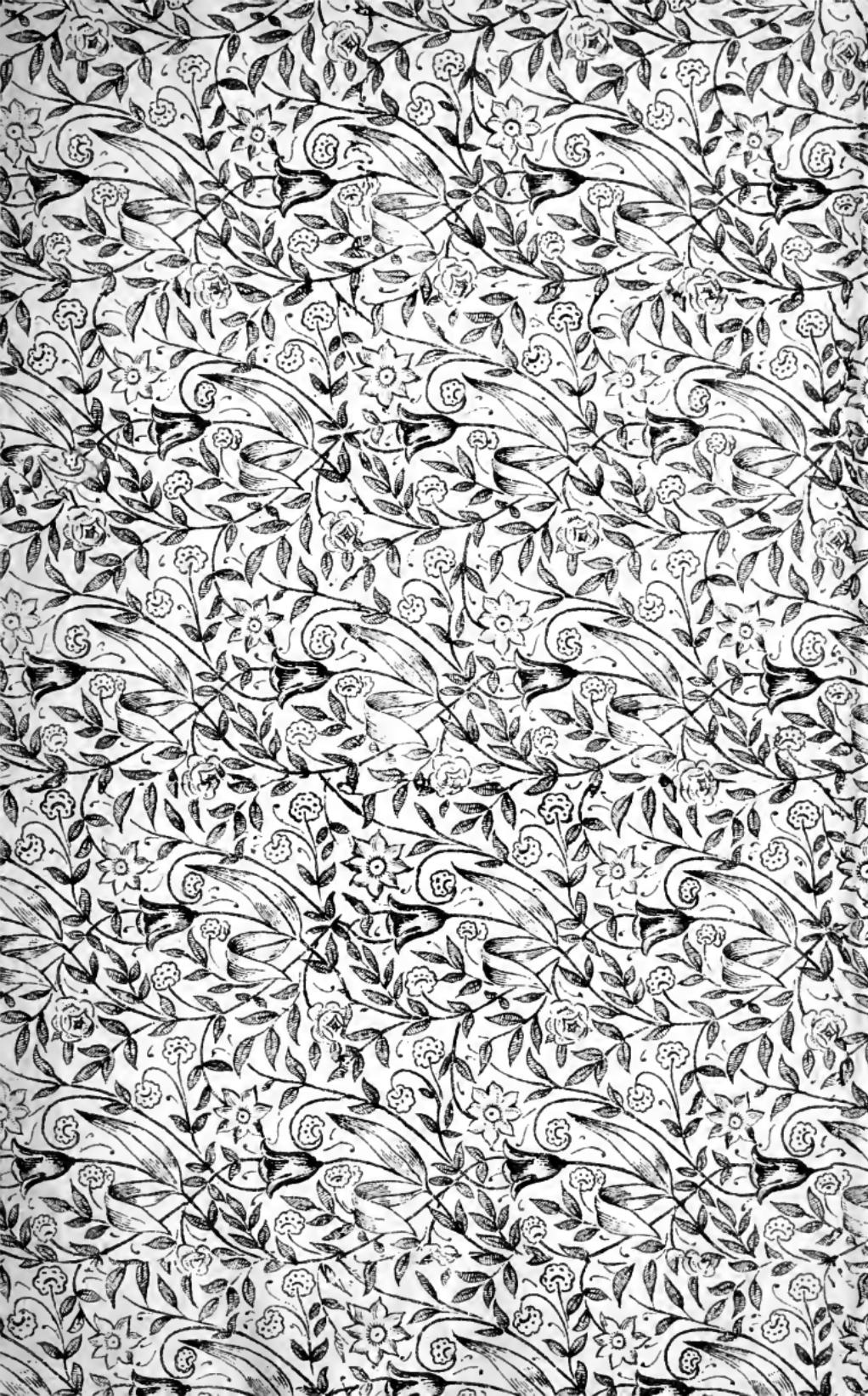
Uplifted suddenly, I catch  
A brightening gleam from far within,  
And o'er the voices of the world  
I hear a music beating clear  
From spirits tuned to perfect rest :  
Beneath the agonies of men  
I feel—the Cross—the deep response  
Of God to pain ; beneath their sin,  
The Cross—the sign and pledge of love  
That all the ages shall not waste,  
Nor change, nor ever swerve aside  
From any soul of man that lives.











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